

Second Lives: The Survey and Use of Architectural Study Collections

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Architectural study collections are collections of architectural artifacts—the actual parts of historic buildings and structures that have been salvaged for study or for research and display purposes. Such artifacts can be useful reference tools for preservationists because they can reveal information about historic building materials, technology and craftsmanship.

An architectural study collection can consist of various architectural features—fireplace mantels, windows, doors—which may be representative of materials, craftsmanship, technology, finishes, or collections and could include manufactured items such as hardware. In order to be useful, information that provides the object with context should be provided, such as what building it is from, what the object is, and where, if known, it was located on the building. Some collections might be limited to a specific site, place or region. Collections may be started as a result of repair or replacement of features or as a result of a building's demolition.

Architectural study collections help to fill the gap in our understanding of the craft practices of a region, the use of materials and finishes, how different building parts or units were assembled, and the hidden process-

es that exist beneath finishes or behind walls. These objects are three-dimensional, actual, tangible, historic materials, and they represent the structure in a way that cannot be illustrated by photographs, photogrammetry, measured drawings, architects' plans, construction blueprints, oral history and even personal recollection. Yet, because these artifacts have been removed from their original place in the historic structure, they are objects taken out of context, and can mislead or misrepresent the structure if the supporting two-dimensional documentation is not available or is not studied.

The Importance of Study Collections

Construction techniques and craft practices can vary due to regional practice, ethnic tradition, available materials and expertise. Architectural artifacts are tangible links with the building's craftsmen and owners—they reflect the expertise, lifestyle, financial standing, and explore the realm of what was possible for that time and set of circumstances. With comparison, with analysis, with study, architectural artifacts provide irrefutable evidence of what was used and how buildings were fashioned. [It should be noted that the National Park Service guidelines never recommend removal of a feature that—although damaged or deteriorated—could reasonably be repaired and thus preserved in place.¹]

Current construction techniques and materials differ from historic construction techniques and materials. Many of the historic craft practices were learned during a lengthy apprenticeship—a combination of oral instruction and hands-on work—and little documentation about actual historic construction practice exists. Even with today's construction, the kinds of records

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In 1987 work began on identifying architectural study collections in the United States as part of a Skills Development Plan project.¹ Building on an initial survey of National Park Service regional historical architects, architectural conservators and others who work on historic structures in the parks, a preliminary list of collections was developed. Also included were those sites within the national park system whose Scope of Collection statements indicated that architectural materials could be collected.

An illustrated flier explained how architectural study collections were defined, why it was important to collect such artifacts, and what could be learned from them. This, with a letter and a request for information, was sent to over 200 collections. The response to the survey was overwhelming and positive—50% responded, and several sent brochures and books.

That first information was immediately useful. With the preliminary listing and survey responses, it was possible to assist Catherine Anderson, museum intern, Smithsonian Institution, in identifying several major collections in the Midwest and Northeast. Ms. Anderson was then able to see how the collection curators addressed the problems associated with the storage and conservation of these objects and was able to prepare a conservation guideline for the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Combining our efforts, Ms. Anderson and I collaborated in a presentation entitled "Historic Materials and Architectural Artifacts as Prototypes for Substitute Materials" which was delivered at the Association for Preservation Technology International (APT) Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA, in 1991.

Since that time, the survey results have been incorporated into a database and a draft listing has been prepared. This listing has two sections: the first lists collections by state; and the second section lists collections by each topic on the survey. This listing is currently being reviewed, revised and updated.

—EAB

¹ *The Skills Development Plan for Historical Architects and Others with Historic Preservation Responsibilities* by Hugh C. Miller, FAIA, Lee H. Nelson, FAIA, and Emogene A. Bevitt, is a self-directed learning program for National Park Service personnel to help them develop knowledge and expertise that is not otherwise available. Participants develop study plans to pursue topics of personal and job-related interest and to communicate their study results with others, after receiving critical review.

(**Collections**—continued from page 15)

that are kept rarely include the shop drawings or models that translate the architect's sketches and blueprints into craft units. Lacking written documentation or working knowledge, the preservationist must carefully examine the clues given by original artifacts and weigh these against other documentary information such as photographs, engravings, bills, insurance descriptions, letters, sketches, public documents, and other scholarly interpretations of this kind of material, in order to gain an accurate understanding of the composition and evolution of the structure.

Developing a Usable List

The National Park Service has begun to compile a list of the architectural study collections in the United States by contacting potential collection holders and requesting that they share information about their collections by filling out a 2-page Request for Information. The Request for Information has been reproduced in this issue of *CRM* so that readers can identify and share information about possible collections so that the survey can be as useful and complete as possible. At present 126 collections in the National Park Service and 87 collections held by other agencies, historical societies, museums and individuals are included in the survey. If you can provide information about a collection your organization has, please fill out the Request for

Information. If you can suggest sources, please contact me by mail at Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, fax 202-343-3803 or telephone 202-343-9561. Your participation is appreciated.

In order to narrow the focus of this compilation, the following have not been included in the listing: **collections outside the United States; whole historic buildings or structures; period rooms; commercial salvage companies; furniture or furnishings; and/or tools.**

While this list will focus on architectural objects or artifacts—the three-dimensional parts of a building, there are often instances in which other information about the building will be maintained along with the objects. Such items as architectural drawings, photographs, stereopairs, postcards, and trade catalogs provide a different kind of information about a structure. Information about these collections will also be welcome and may appear in a separate listing or as a subset of this list.

Watch for additional information on this topic.

¹ Restated from "Introduction to the Guidelines," p. xi, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, 1992.

(**Cumberland**—continued from page 4)

ter shells confined in burlap bags and manually placed would ultimately be worked into an interlocking rake. This indeed proved to be the case. The burlap bags deteriorated at an almost uniform rate, and the shell was freed to be sorted and arranged by wave activity in a uniform fashion. The end product was an artificial rake that interacted with natural forces to create a new rake as effective as those produced entirely by nature.

The Cumberland Island project required little expenditure for supplies, the most expensive being the burlap bags and the wire ties to close them. The principal cost was labor, and this was minimized by using available personnel from the National Park Service and the University of Mississippi. Through careful planning, subsistence and transportation expenses were also minimized.

We are encouraged that conservation of archeological properties can be effectuated in a fashion that emulates the natural healing process. We are further heartened that significant resources can be protected at relatively low cost simply by carefully observing the ways

natural forces operate. Patterning stabilization designs on naturally occurring phenomena increases the chances for successful protection of archeological deposits and resources while enhancing the natural environment.

Reference

Ehrenhard, John E, and Robert M. Thorne, 1991, "An Experiment in Archeological Site Stabilization: Cumberland Island National Seashore." *CRM*, 14:2, pp. 13-16.

John Ehrenhard is the chief of the Interagency Archeological Services Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service (telephone: 404-331-2629). Dr. Robert Thorne is director of the National Clearinghouse for Archaeological Sites Stabilization and director for the Center of Archaeological Research. He is also a professor of anthropology at the University of Mississippi (Telephone: 601-232-7316). The National Park Service and the University of Mississippi have a cooperative agreement for site stabilization projects in the United States.

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
ABOUT
ARCHITECTURAL STUDY COLLECTIONS**

This request is intended to identify the existence and location of formal or informal collections of *historic building parts, materials, features, and examples of craft practices*—which might be thought of as having potential for exhibit and/or research purposes by historical architects, building technologists, preservationists and others. This survey is limited to those objects that are no longer part of an historic building or period room; objects that have lost their context. The information provided will be used to develop a list of architectural study collections in the United States. This effort is part of a *Skills Development Plan Study Plan*. Your assistance is appreciated.

Name of Owner or Museum or Park: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Scope of Collection: (Please describe the contents of the collection including the main type of object or specimen. Are they related to one site or multiple sites? If you have no architectural objects, please write “No collection.”)

Representative dates of collection: _____

Instructions for filling in the columns:

1. “Number of Parts”: If none, write NA (not applicable). If exact number is not available, use estimates.

PLEASE LEAVE NO SQUARES BLANK.

2. “Comments”: Use this space to provide information about the period, style, or materials of these items.

Parts of buildings in collection	Number of Parts	Comments
structural parts (wood or iron) for framing systems and connecting devices.		
exterior features such as column capitals, terra cotta		
wall cladding, such as shakes, clapboards, etc.		
roofing materials like tile, slate, shingles, tin, etc.		
rain conductor parts, like heads and downspouts		
window frames, sash, shutters		
doors and related features like frontispieces, transoms, sidelights, pediments		

Parts of buildings in collection (continued)	Number of Parts	Comments
Interior features, such as fireplace mantles, portions of stairs, decorative features such as carved wooden brackets		
heating devices and stoves		
flooring: wood, encaustic tile, marble, etc.		
lighting devices such as gaslighting fixtures, electrical lighting fixtures and wiring		
plumbing equipment		
hardware for doors and windows, bell systems, etc.		
iron and other metals for railing, fences, grilles, cresting, storefronts, spandrels, columns, cornices, etc.		
streetscape and small-scale elements in the landscape, such as benches, lights, signs, clocks, memorials, etc.		
molding samples		
plaster samples		
paints, graining, marbling samples		
wallpaper samples		
mortar samples		
other		
other		

Physical location of collection: _____

Is it accessible for research purposes? Yes _____ No _____

Are any objects on exhibit? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, where? _____

Are there any publications that refer to this collection? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please provide title, author and date of publication. _____

Information provided by: _____ Date: _____

Person to contact regarding collection: _____

Please send completed information to Emogene Bevitt, Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127. Thank you for your assistance. rev. April 7, 1993.